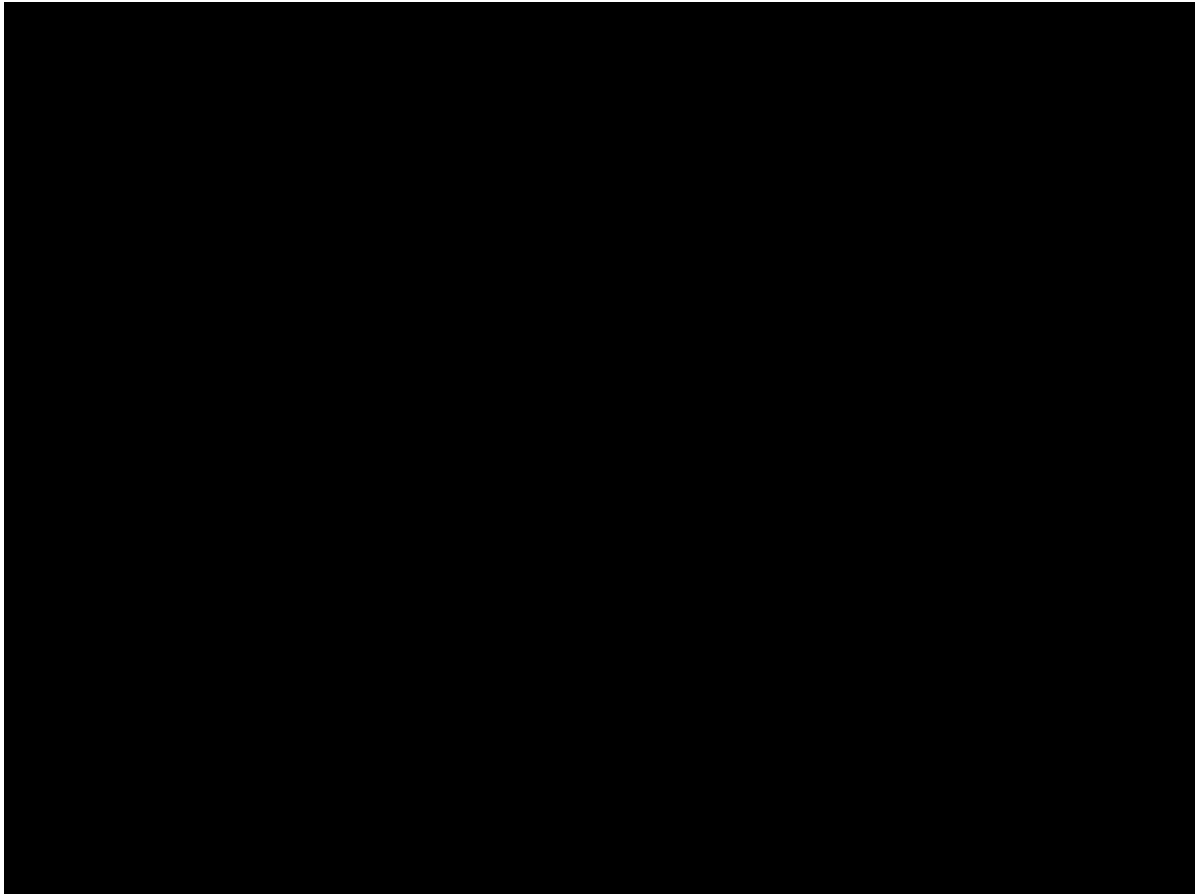


The Green Color of Grief: Spider-Human Dreams

by Snežana Stanković and Linda Paganelli | Corona A(e)ffects: Radical Affectivities of Dissent and Hope, Issue 10.2 (Fall 2021)

ABSTRACT This essay tries to read the pandemic-afflicted (human) world in terms of post-human translation. In echoing Anna Tsing's call for "collaborative survival," it speaks in images of human-spiders in the forest who sense the radical isolation of humans and, thus, loss of proximity. One witnesses ill-treatment of various bodies: those that are economized, racialized, or nationalized. In this way, the essay proposes a post-human approach to distorted intimacies worldwide. It uses multimodal means of reflection: film, photography, sounds, and words. Through such a combination of nonverbal and verbal elements, the essay argues against the divisions of humans-culture-nature. It asks the reader to rethink how we could exist in equal mutuality.

KEYWORDS grief, pandemic, proximity, isolation, post-human, distance, spider, nature, mutuality



Introduction

It was a March morning (year 2020). At first, I¹ did not notice that the world stood still. Like every other day, I marked the frame and anchor points and laid a bridge line across the top. While twisting long fibers into a continuous silk train (*fibrous proteins*) between tree branches, I sensed a strange silence. Formerly noisy and confusing, spheres of full-humans were strangely silent. They were isolated from each other.

As my home is located in the urban forest alongside the Teltow canal, which once formed part of the border between the former West Berlin and East Berlin, I often use aerial dispersal strategies to reach the city. When “released in the atmosphere,”² my silk lines help me move away from my place of residence. They help soften the enduring sadness over refugees who were shot dead while trying to cross the canal borderline and escape to the West.

That March morning, my dispersive walk toward the full-human habitat was an act of curiosity about the overwhelming silence. Playgrounds were empty, and schools closed;

you could hear only the rare steps of a random passerby or the wind blowing, causing swings to sway.

As if life were no more.

Indoor noises would pass through some windows and walls, revealing the continuing lives behind them.

Then I learned that these suddenly atomized spheres of human animals had started facing the infectious disease COVID-19 that became a pandemic. Not only did the horizons become quarantined by the walls of homes, hospitals, orphanages, nurseries, prisons, and (in the case of the homeless) street districts, but also were lives confronted by the very reality of mortality. Grief swept through the world.

Oneiric Lamentation



< <https://csalateral.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Picture-1Spider-Human-Lamentations-jpg-Linda-Paganelli.jpg> >

Figure 1. Spider-Human Lamentations by Linda Paganelli.

I was eager to keep looking at this world but not to step into it, for I feared becoming self-estranged again. Once, I was a human animal too. This is why I can still use human

language while it echoes like “murmury.” While I move along my nighttime memories, walking towards the waking life, let me “remumble” those arrrr(a)chived visions.³

My human community was famous for its ability to spin webs most beneficial and suitable for long-distance dispersals: You can imagine all those ways of physical and virtual portability and (dis)connection. Dispersing web builders would carry on by extending their webs into an insurmountable distance. Please, note, human silks are indeed similar to spider silks—they require the “continuous application of large forces to stretch a great distance before breaking.”⁴ However, there is a sad difference between arachnid and human “work of extension.”⁵ In my former community, web builders followed the “vertical dynamic of dominium” to acquire “rights of use and disposal.”⁶ I admit, my current horizontal spider communities hunt, and some members are deadly predators. However, vertical human predations most often imply lethal hunter-prey relationships. So, I had to escape this (full-)human world and de-humanize myself. I let myself become bestialized⁷ in search of freedom: while I am often repulsive in everyday life, mythopoetic thought tells stories of desire and protection. But I am neither a thought nor an image. I am alive. Yes, I may be a monster⁸ choosing to be involved in “mutualism shown for ants and plants,”⁹ for trees, light, and wind; a monster that need not hunt but can feed on nectar and pollen. I am a monster, similar to matsutake as described by Anna Tsing, requiring “the dynamic multispecies diversity of the forest—with its contaminating relationality.”¹⁰

The world I was looking at was affected by the pandemic, and at this very moment, while I share with you these wandering visions, it is still enduring the disease. The memory of the human inside myself can feel multiple dramas of loss. The so-called lockdown state re-introduced self-and-other separations. These isolations have produced species-by-species¹¹ and human-by-human worldviews with frozen movements and enlarged distancing. In many human worlds, touch ceased to exist.

Of course, touch can also be harmful. Such grievous proximities behind the indoor walls of homes, hospitals, or prisons seem impossible to stop. Obviously, touches can feed upon violence. This lapse is (a helpless) call not to forget.

However, touch may defy physical/ mental/ spiritual isolation. Like in the dance performance and video installation the fault lines <<https://archiv.ruhrtriennale.de/www.2013.ruhrtriennale.de/en/programm/produktionen/stuart-gehmacher-the-fault-lines/index.html>> by the choreographers Meg Stuart and Philipp Gehmacher and visual artist Vladimir Miller, persons oscillate(d) between distance and proximity. In the fault lines, bodies move in mutual fascination, tenderness and vulnerability. A scholar of theater and performance studies Krassimira Kruschkova says that “A movement which would rather be none, which prefers not to. Rapt touches bordering on violence, fierce, unrestrained and at the same time casual, oblivious. Amnesia of gestures, contingency of touch.”¹²

These visions go along with solitary individual and family walks in my forest. Separately, people take shelter in the forest, exchanging gratifying looks and words that immediately fade away. I want to read these forest walks as an encounter between dancing bodies with clear aerial borders “between each other without [the bodies] crossing.”¹³

"In all their immeasurability, incalculability—and vulnerability,"¹⁴ these were exposed bodies, "exposed to touch . . . As if they were phantom pain, a painful nothingness, completely exposed to the other. Touching each other as attention and distance."¹⁵

Today, some borders are aerial and invisible, similar to the unrecognizable, unmarked, East-West borderlines. However, here, my visions do not merely coincide with the walled world of the pandemic, but also with the echoes of those (human) persons stuck in Bosnia and Herzegovina before the closure of the EU border. One of the forests bordering Croatia is not a place for a sheltered walk but an enforced refuge where one freezes and starves to death.¹⁶

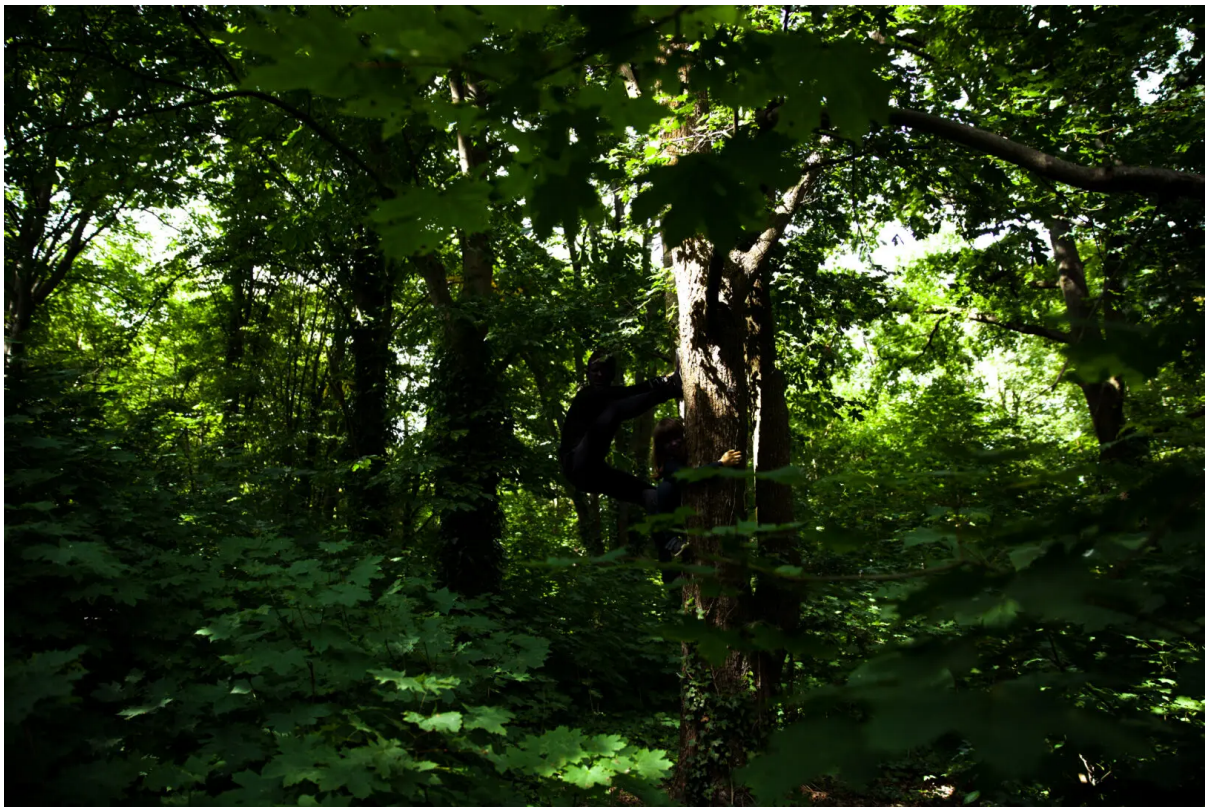
My grief vibrates and stretches to release the noise of dissent.

The spread of COVID-19 exposes the very nature of human vulnerability and cruelty. Strangers have become more visible. Now, even more than before, migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers are targeted as carriers of the virus. Namelessness in a list of ill, dying, and buried persons reminds of (cruel) hierarchies that govern the world. Falling into silence and oblivion is a dreadful scenario that confronts human animals today. As some newspapers have reported, people are devastated by the images of tractors that transport the dead (cadavers) to cemeteries.¹⁷ In the Amazonian Manaus, newspaper articles revealed how the dead "were just dumped . . . like dogs" in "trincheiras [trenches]." "What are our lives worth now? Nothing?" are the kinds of questions many pose today.¹⁸ Trenches dug in advance while anticipating the dead bodies, and rapid methods with no burial services change how one copes with death. With these experiences in mind, one can better comprehend Thomas Laqueur's description that "even in the crisis of the first great plague epidemic of 1348–1349, when the dead were placed in the mass graves of emergency burial grounds in their thousands, they were put there with care." Bodies would be aligned and put to rest with small coins and other offerings and by facing east, they were prepared for the resurrection.¹⁹

Who are those who are cared for today? Who is allowed to receive medical and emotional attention? Those shivering in poverty, hopelessly waiting before various kinds of doors? Most often not.

The environment is deeply grieved in its soul.

Loss



< <https://csalateral.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Picture-2-Spider-Humans-caught-sight-of-a-still-world-Linda-Paganelli.jpg> >

Figure 2. Spider-Humans caught sight of a still world by Linda Paganelli.

My forest-dwelling is the sadness of sensing the present-day world. I am at home, but I am homesick, for my environment suffers continual changes. My grief occurs as an enduring feeling of *solastalgia*, a feeling of disquiet caused by dramatic changes in the environment.

However, each lifeworld resists chronology and locality. Day and night collapse on top of us and flow into the "evening world." "Whom we dreamt was a shaddo . . ." ²⁰ Once a liquid world, indeed, that wants to regain a never-ending flow. A fearless ingrrrrresion—a fearless cirrrrrrrrculation.

The past, present, and future are sites of imagination in the form of inherited or lived memory-dreams that long, hope, or regret. In this vein, events and locations become emotions and sensations that accompany us wherever we go. Toni Morrison speaks of images that float around us—"the remains, so to speak, at the archaeological site—surface first, and they surface so vividly and so compellingly that I acknowledge them as my route to a reconstruction of a world, to an exploration of an interior life that was not written, and to the revelation of a kind of truth." ²¹ My grief is green as it envisions barren grounds of solitude and nothingness where the world and these grounds appear frozen in their sounds and motion. Where colors evaporate and we radically lose (our-)selves. However, as Karen Barad states in the case of nuclear landscapes, "loss is not absence but a marked presence." Questions of absence and presence are political, yet we move within the law of the void. ²² Whose presence counts? Whose absence moves us to wander

about and imagine the disappeared existence as something that could have been in the future?²³ Now, we inhabit the landscapes that must haunt us, all those landscapes of degraded lives, all the endangered and disappeared beings, and nature that ages due to its devastating exhaustion. In this vein, green is spectral through its recurrent, stubborn presence and healing that attempts to save life—the life that does not contain “racial, let alone genetic purity,” that “displays mad hospitality.”²⁴ This madness, read (im)possibility, of being always welcome erupts in playful modes of engagement and affection. Green both mutes and amplifies the world to its radical openness. Listen if you can. Sounds mutually fluctuate in taming each other: birds full of song, wind clattering through leaves, my fellow insects stridulating—buzzing, chirping, whistling. All these waves try to incorporate and nonviolently background mechanical noises. I want to radiate green in the “nonviewable” field of humans, too—to help them feel this noisy harmony. Like in Deaf worlds, as Stefan Helmreich writes, we may refuse simple binaries of (just) hearing and non-hearing, and instead, learn how to “hear-by-feeling sound,”²⁵ to enter “relational ontologies” that are “not always spoken” and “not always human.”²⁶ In that way, the audible and visible may merge into a sensory condition of green that allows us to twist together various histories and meanings, beliefs, associations, and implementations, to escape any containment—of hegemony of sight, touch, hearing My personalized green is too green: “something extra has slipped”²⁷ away from my memories in the prrrroprocess of forming a dreamt freedom. Now, a humanly constructed traffic light turns green, saying: “You may pass.” Once the color of aid and care, today, it represents the sign of permission, i.e., freedom to pass.²⁸

I mourn possible futures, for my green memory is nostologic. I use “nostologic” in the sense of aging and second childhood that Carol Mavor links to the fascination with “a tiny patch of yellow” in Jan Vermeer’s painting *The View of Delft*, which Marcel Proust invokes in *À la recherche du temps perdu*.²⁹ Nature and I age while longing to return to our first childhoods — those without awareness of acute pain in the world. However, we have to age to the second childhood that leaves us with our encapsulating emotions of tiredness and abandonment. Does it have to be this way? I rarely spot an enlivening affect “ever on the move from situation to situation, string context-orderings in eventfulness” with “its context-rocking transsituational drift” — “the life-glue of the world—a world capable of surprise (surplus-value of being).”³⁰ Does it mean that the human world is afraid of relations that affect and drag into a co-participatory state and “excess of belonging-together?”³¹ Green used to achieve this and will hopefully continue doing so all the way, reminding of its foundation of companionship.

David Kessler would term my existential anxiety “anticipatory grief” that feels the approaching storm of the future. ³² The pandemic has intensified this feeling by its seeming eternity: It will never end.

Although the green color has withdrawn before the rainy and snowy winter landscapes, my sight has captured green sensations. Smells of sounds inside the naked trees echoing the color; my locomotion touches upon the remembered green surfaces while silk lines of hope emerge.

Closure: Hopeful Wake



<https://csalateral.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Picture-3-Spider-Humans-Radical-Affectivities-Linda-Paganelli.jpg>

Figure 3. Spider-Humans Radical Affectivities by Linda Paganelli.

This is a dream-time diary. Landscapes are real “sights for more-than-human dreams.”³³ I want to wake you up to a life full of “indiscretions and transgressions,”³⁴ colored in green that disperses in all chromatic directions and allows disturbances that affect and relationally contaminate.³⁵ We are only alive “in the company of (in community with) other life forms.”³⁶ I am at the wake as I mourn the escalating loss of otherness,³⁷ but I do not assume my companions (are) dead. My wakeful dwelling is hope that this loss can be overcome by guarding against forgetting “significant otherness.”³⁸ Christina Sharpe writes about “the work of staying in the wake” of slavery by asking, “how can we think (and rethink and rethink) care laterally, in the register of the intramural, in a different relation than that of the violence of the state?”³⁹

You are reading post-human lines that want to dissent from the human-centered worldview. I am not a metaphor nor a concept,⁴⁰ but an embodied quest for mutually affecting relationality.

Allow me a human reflection. I will understand the fellow reader who ponders on my ability to transmit the pandemic-afflicted world. One might discuss my human-centered

narration,⁴¹ and I admit that it is a translational move that uses the old semantic tools I kept all along after escaping the full-human spheres. Solastalgia and nostalgia blend through my mutation through a longing for boundary-crossing entanglements and more-than-human love. As I am a life in transition, some human traces, like hands and visions, are inconsistent with my ethereal mode of attachment. Feel frrrrreeee to approach, for I am Maman,⁴² a wall-less house-like being with green freedom(s) to pass and enable us to come across each other(s).


Acknowledgments
















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Notes

1. The narration uses the pronoun "I," which stands for the poetic subject of the Spider-Human. [↗](#)
2. Dries Bonte, "Cost-Benefit Balance of Dispersal and the Evolution of Conditional Dispersal Strategies in Spiders" in *Ecophysiology*, edited by Wolfgang Nentwig (Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer, 2013), 67–68. [↗](#)
3. In *Finnegans Wake* by James Joyce, poetic terms like "murmury/mummery" are tied to dream visions and night memories that prevail during the subject's waking state. James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (London: Penguin Books, 2000); John Bishop, *Joyce's Book of the Dark: Finnegans Wake* (London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986). [↗](#)
4. Todd A. Blackledge, "Spider Silk: Molecular Structure and Function in Webs" in *Spiders Ecophysiology*, edited by Wolfgang Nentwig (Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer, 2013), 267–268. [↗](#)
5. Blackledge, "Spider Silk," 267–68. [↗](#)
6. Annabel Brett, "Is There Any Place for Environmental Thinking in Early Modern European Political Thought?" in *Nature, Action and the Future*, edited by Katrina Forrester and Sophie Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 27. [↗](#)
7. I am aware that the process of bestialization can trigger confusion with the human concept of bestiality and brutality. Here I mean an elusive distortion contained within the coexistence of ugliness and beauty. [↗](#)
8. Julian C. H. Lee, Hariz Halilovich, Ani Landau-Ward, Peter Phipps, and Richard J. Sutcliffe, *Monsters of Modernity* (Leeds: Kismet Press, 2019). [↗](#)

9. Dirk Sanders, "Herbivory in Spiders" in *Spiders Ecophysiology*, edited by Wolfgang Nentwig (Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer, 2013), 385. [↗](#)
10. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 40. [↗](#)
11. Tsing, *Mushroom at the End of the World*, 139. [↗](#)
12. Krassimira Kruschkova, "The Fault Lines of Touching," in *Touching and Being Touched*, edited by Gabriele Brandstetter, Gerko Egert and Sabine Zubarik (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 105. [↗](#)
13. Kruschkova, "The Fault Lines of Touching," 108. [↗](#)
14. Kruschkova, "The Fault Lines of Touching," 108. [↗](#)
15. Kruschkova, "The Fault Lines of Touching," 108. [↗](#)
16. Danijel Kovacevic, "Migrants, Refugees Spurn Return to Torched Camp in Bosnia," *BalkanInsight*, January 4, 2021, <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/01/04/migrants-refugees-spurn-return-to-torched-camp-in-bosnia> < <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/01/04/migrants-refugees-spurn-return-to-torched-camp-in-bosnia> > . [↗](#)
17. Aylin Woodward and Dave Mosher, "Sobering photos reveal how countries are dealing with the dead left by the coronavirus pandemic," *Business Insider*, April 13, 2020. [↗](#)
18. Tom Phillips and Fabiano Maisonnave, "'Utter Disaster': Manaus Fills Mass Graves as Covid-19 Hits the Amazon" *The Guardian*, April 30, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/30/brazil-manaus-coronavirus-mass-graves> < <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/30/brazil-manaus-coronavirus-mass-graves> > ; see also "Mass Graves Being Dug and Long Queues Forming at Banks as Brazil's Covid-19 Crisis Deepens," YouTube, April 30, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SQYvA6NjOdo> < <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SQYvA6NjOdo> > . [↗](#)
19. Thomas Walter Laqueur, *The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 126. [↗](#)
20. Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*; also, Bishop, *Joyce's Book of the Dark*. [↗](#)
21. Toni Morrison, *The Source of Self-Regard: Selected Essays, Speeches, and Meditations* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2019), 240. [↗](#)
22. Karen Barad, "No Small Matter: Mushroom Clouds, Ecologies of Nothingness, and Strange Topologies of Spacetime-mattering" in *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*, edited by Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, Elaine Gan, and Nils Bubandt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 103–20. [↗](#)
23. Barad, "No Small Matter." [↗](#)
24. Dorion Sagan, "The Human is More than Human: Interspecies Communities and the New 'Facts of Life,'" *Fieldsights* (2011): <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/the-human-is-more-than-human-interspecies-communities-and-the-new-facts-of-life> < <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/the-human-is-more-than-human-interspecies-communities-and-the-new-facts-of-life> > . [↗](#)
25. Stefan Helmreich, *Sounding the Limits of Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 167. [↗](#)
26. Helmreich, *Sounding the Limits*, 171. [↗](#)
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31. Massumi, "Too-Blue," 191. 
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33. Tsing, *The Mushroom*, 152. 
34. Sagan, *The Human is More than Human*. 
35. Tsing, *The Mushroom*, 152. 
36. Augustine Fuentes, "The Whole is More than the Sum of the Parts: Extended Minds and Extended Selves," *Fieldsights* (2011): <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/the-whole-is-more-than-the-sum-of-the-parts-extended-minds-and-extended-selves> < <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/the-whole-is-more-than-the-sum-of-the-parts-extended-minds-and-extended-selves> > . 
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38. Haraway, *Companion Species Manifesto*. 
39. Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 20. 
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41. David Herman, *Narratology beyond the Human* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 139–40. 
42. See Louise Bourgeois, *Maman (Ama)*, 1999, cast 2001 in bronze, marble, and stainless steel, 29' 4³/₈" x 32' 1⁷/₈" x 38' 5⁵/₈", <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/10856> < <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/10856> > . 

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